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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 001397

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2014

TAGS: [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: SOME BAHAMIANS DON'T ACCEPT ALL COLORS OF THE RAINBOW

REF: A. NASSAU 1342

[1](#)B. NASSAU 1382

Classified By: CHARGE ROBERT M. WITAJEWSKI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (SBU) An estimated 150 protesters gathered early July 16 in downtown Nassau to denounce the government's willingness to allow the "Norwegian Dawn" cruise ship, which on this particular cruise had a large contingent of U.S. citizen-gay families on a trip organized in part by U.S. celebrity Rosie O'Donnell. Embassy Political and Consular officers along with RSO monitored the ship's arrival and the demonstrations that lasted from slightly before 8 a.m. until 10 a.m. when protesters disbanded as scheduled by police. Prominent Bahamian pastors in the "Save The Bahamas" Campaign gave fiery speeches denouncing homosexuality as well as against specific members of the Perry Christie Government that they believe to be homosexual than they had earlier. Minister of Foreign Affairs Fred Mitchell and Minister of Tourism Obie Wilchombe were cited as examples of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) Government's ignoring of what protest organizers claimed were the Bahamian peoples' concerns about homosexuality. Local media and an HBO documentary film crew from the U.S. were present for the protest in its entirety. The "Norwegian Dawn" departed Nassau at mid-afternoon. End Summary.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS MEET CRUISE SHIP PASSENGERS

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[1](#)2. (SBU) Consular Officer and Political Officer arrived at Rawson Square in the heart of downtown Nassau where cruise ship passengers exit the port facility shortly before 8:00 am. Approximately 100 protesters had already gathered and were listening to the impassioned speeches of various Bahamian Protestant ministers decrying homosexual lifestyles. The speeches themselves reiterated past themes as the religious leaders told their followers that gay lifestyles do not follow Christian values.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Quoting from the Bahamian Constitution's reference to The Bahamas being a Christian nation, Apostle Christopher Russell bashed the current Administration for "promoting gays" in The Bahamas. Citing Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Tourism Obie Wilchombe, both widely rumored to be homosexuals, by name, the religious figures dared Prime Minister Perry G. Christie "to stand up as a man, if he is one" and state where the Progressive Liberal Party stands on the issue of homosexuality.

RAINBOW ALLIANCE HAS SMALL PRESENCE

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[1](#)4. (SBU) Perhaps a dozen members of Rainbow Alliance, a local gay rights activist organization, were also present during the rally. For the most part however, they stayed away from the platform and remained directly outside the gate where the passengers entered the Square to welcome the cruise ship visitors before they faced the protesters. Embassy officers observed a few one-on-one debates between Alliance members and protesters during the course of the morning, but all of these were peaceful and relatively calm.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Members of Rainbow Alliance supporting the gay contingent of the cruise ship passengers, as well as protesters who were opposing their presence in The Bahamas, gave several interviews to local media as well as to the HBO documentary film crew who were onboard the cruise ship to document the first cruise ship cruise catering to gay families. One camera crew from HBO followed one gay couple with their children during their morning of shopping on Bay Street, Nassau's main tourist shopping strip.

SECURITY ISSUES AT PROTEST

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[1](#)6. (C) Embassy had been in contact with the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPf) in advance of the planned protest to

discuss security concerns as they might impact on the overwhelmingly U.S. passengers on the ship. As agreed upon, the RBPF stationed a few dozen uniformed police force and Defence Force officials, with others under-cover, in the area of the protest/counter-protest.

17. (SBU) What appeared to be the first male gay couple disembarked the ship at approximately 8:30am and the couple walked, with their four children, from Prince George's Wharf into downtown Nassau relatively undisturbed except for the accompanying HBO film crews. Although the majority of passengers apparently chose to stay on the ship, those who did chose to disembark did so 9 a.m. Many went straight from the ship to waiting buses to be taken on standard tours of the island or to the zoo.

18. (C) Central Detective Unit Superintendent, Marvin Dames, contacted the RSO shortly after 10 a.m. to inform him that a few Bahamian protesters had been arrested for following and harassing some of the cruise ship passengers walking around downtown. After the arrests, the protesters appear to have disbanded. RSO commended the Royal Bahamas Police Force for their vigilance in maintaining law and order.

EMBASSY LETTER APPEARS IN PAPER

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19. (C) On July 14 the Deputy Director General at the Ministry of Tourism, Ms. Vernice Walkine, requested a letter from the Embassy -- supposedly for internal Government use only -- detailing the Embassy's concerns with the welfare and protection of U.S. citizens in event of any protests or incidents during the cruise ship's stopover in Nassau. The text of the letter was immediately leaked to the local media..

110. (U) Excerpts from the letter appeared on the front page of the country's two principal newspapers, "The Tribune" and "The Nassau Guardian" on July 16. After referring to widespread media reporting of the controversy generated among Bahamians by the cruise ship visit and the need to balance the free expression of opinion with safety and security, and noting the Embassy's special interest in the protection and welfare of U.S. citizens, the letter requested that the Embassy "be kept apprised of any developments that might impact the safety of U.S. citizens."

COMMENT

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111. (C) Minister of Tourism Obie Wilchombe seems to have been seeking the cover of the U.S. Embassy by disclosing our letter to the media as the justification for providing an increased police presence during the ship's visit.

112. (U) As of 2:00 p.m., there have been no indications that U.S. citizens have been significantly inconvenienced by the protests. The "Norwegian Dawn" has departed Nassau and three other cruise ships have subsequently arrived and docked at Prince George's Wharf and disembarked their passengers.
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